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RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0056

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000162

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR G/TIP, DRL AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KTIP KCRM KWMN HSTC AM

SUBJECT: MAJOR TRAFFICKING RECRUITER SENT TO PRISON

REFS: A) 06 YEREVAN 1715 B) 06 YEREVAN 1667 C) 06 YEREVAN 1548 D) 06 YEREVAN 1524 E) 06 YEREVAN 1161 F) 06 YEREVAN 1091

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(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Four TIP defendants were convicted January 31, after a four-month hearing. The defendants had been accused in connection with a case involving the three witnesses (reflets) who complained of misconduct by an investigator in the prosecutor general's office the previous summer. This case prompted a series of embassy interventions with high-level government officials during the summer and fall, which eventually led to the restructuring of the Prosecutor General's Anti-TIP Unit and the transfer and demotion of the accused investigator (ref A). All four defendants were charged under the pimping statute, and one was also subject to trafficking charges. The sentences varied from suspended prison terms to five years in jail. END SUMMARY.

TRAFFICKER SUPPLIED WOMEN TO PIMPS IN DUBAI AND TURKEY

¶2. (SBU) The central figure of the case is Gayane Melkonyan, who recruited vulnerable women on behalf of pimps in Turkey and Dubai during the last few years. She was charged under both the trafficking and pimping statutes of the Criminal Code. Two of the pimps, Mairanush Harutyunyan and Ruzanna Bagdasaryan, both of whom operated in Turkey, were charged under the pimping statute, which criminalizes the "engagement in prostitution of other persons for profit." The fourth defendant, Sousanna Nikoghosyan, was involved with Melkonyan in recruiting women for Harutyunyan and Bagdasaryan and was charged under the pimping statute.

¶3. (SBU) The Procuracy has launched criminal cases under the trafficking statute against three other pimps to whom Melkonyan supplied women. These pimps are: Gohar Kirakosyan, operating in Trabzon, Turkey; Irina Yenokyan, operating in Dubai; and Meline Gevorgyan, operating in Aidn-Kushadas, Turkey. All have been declared wanted by the state.

VICTIMS AND WITNESSES

¶4. (SBU) According to the case materials, Melkonyan, aided by

Nikoghosyan, sent three women each to Harutyunyan and Baghdasaryan. The six women all became witnesses in the case. Each testified in court that they were all well aware that they were going to work as prostitutes, engaged in it voluntarily, and had no further demands. The three witnesses who had earlier complained to the Hope and Help NGO about mistreatment by investigators (ref F), later recanted their original accusations against Harutyunyan. According to court documents, Melkonyan also sent four women to the other pimps (now wanted). She promised each woman a job as a hairdresser or a waitress, but all were forced into prostitution.

CONVICTIONS

¶4. (SBU) Melkonyan was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and Nikoghosyan received a two-year prison sentence. Harutyunyan received a two-year suspended sentence, on the basis of her cooperation with the investigation, confession of guilt, and the fact that she has cancer. Baghdasaryan was also given a two-year suspended sentence due to her cooperation with investigators, confession of guilt, and the testimony of a witness who said Baghdasaryan saved her life. The sentences were lighter than those which would be required for the same crimes committed under the the tougher new law, enacted July 2006, because the criminal acts were committed prior to that change.

¶5. (SBU) Hope and Help NGO told us that the judge, Surik Kostanyan of the first instance court in Shengavit community, showed considerable sensitivity towards the victims and witnesses throughout the case. In one instance, the defense attorney sarcastically asked a victim whether she had been a virgin before arriving in the destination country. Kostanyan reprimanded the defense attorney, saying the question was not relevant to the trial.

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COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) This verdict is an example of the GOAM's stiffening -- though yet imperfect -- resolve to achieve better prosecution and punishment of traffickers. The one trafficking charge was not reduced, and the application of the pimping statute for the other defendants was appropriate, as there was no evidence to prove that they were involved in anything but pimping. We are still concerned about the fact that the victims changed their testimony in the court room to the benefit of the defendants, and have raised our concerns with state officials that their testimony in this respect may have been pressured or bought off. However, we hope that the reorganized Anti-TIP unit will perform better in protecting future victims from compromise, though this remains to be demonstrated. The unit's reorganization demoted and transferred out a thuggish investigator, but unfortunately has also deprived the unit of a conscientious prosecutor, whom we respected.

GODFREY